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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 98 (2014) 1056 – 1061

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**Procedia**  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

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International Conference on Current Trends in ELT

## The Impact of Different Tasks on Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition regarding Different Types of Dictionary

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### Abstract

In this study the effect of form-oriented comprehension and form-oriented production tasks on incidental vocabulary acquisition was investigated with respect to using either monolingual or bilingual dictionaries and also considering gender and bilinguality of the subjects. To meet the aim, 161 Iranian EFL university students were invited to read a text including twelve unknown target words and to complete the above-mentioned tasks. The subjects were informed that they are allowed to consult the pre-assigned dictionaries in order to look up the meaning of the target items. The result of the immediate and delayed vocabulary tests revealed that subjects using monolingual dictionaries (English to English) yielded better results in retention of the words irrespective of gender and bilinguality of the subjects.

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of Urmia University, Iran.

*Keywords:* Incidental words, Retention, bilinguality and gender

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### 1. Introduction

There is no doubt that virtually all second language learners and their teachers are well aware of the fact that learning an additional language involves the learning of large numbers of words (Avila & Sadoski, 1996; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001), but how to accomplish this task is often of great concern to them. How vocabulary is acquired and what are the most efficient means to promote effective acquisition have been worthwhile lines of unease in the

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field of second language acquisition (De La Fuente, 2002, p.82). In sum, they all place emphasis on the fact that mastery of vocabulary is an essential component of second language acquisition.

### *1.1. Incidental and Intentional Vocabulary Acquisition*

In spite of not being convenient to guess the meaning of all unknown words from context, people do manage to learn vocabulary in both their native and foreign languages. (Huckin & Coady, 1999) The question that arises at this point, then is, how this process take place? One view is that learning can be divided into incidental learning and intentional learning. Intentional vocabulary acquisition is memorizing straightforwardly term after term with their respective translations from a list. Learning is quick and therefore usually preferred by learners, but it is also superficial. Learners encounter vocabulary in an isolated, often infinitive form and remain incapable of using it correctly in context. Moreover, intentionally learned vocabulary sinks faster into oblivion. Didactically recommendable vocabulary acquisition exposes learners comprehensively to every term, embedding it deeply and solidly in the mental lexicon.

Incidental vocabulary acquisition, through contextual deduction in target language reading, meets these recommendations. Learners encounter terms together with syntactic information, which helps using the accurate words in an idiomatic way, repeatedly under different aspects and hence engrains in the learners' minds.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Subjects*

The present researchers invited 161 Iranian EFL university students, selected from a pool of over 300 hundred students in Farhangian University of Arak. The potential moderator variables such as age and gender were controlled. The subjects were both male and female and their ages ranged from 22 to 28 years. They were all undergraduates majoring in English Language course. The final sample size was 138 as some of the participants were reluctant to take the post-test. The participants were finally categorized into two groups: Group A (87 male/female monolinguals), who were able to use just Persian as a home or outside language; Group B (74 male/female bilinguals) who used Turkish and Persian as a first and second language, respectively. Subjects were randomly assigned to use either monolingual or bilingual dictionaries

### *2.3. Materials*

#### *2.3.1. Reading passage*

To ensure that the reading passage is an appropriate one in terms of text difficulty level that would allow general comprehension, some passages were randomly selected and then readability formula was run afterward to obtain an index of readability for them. The mean index turned out to be 22.83. Then the readability formula, after studying many texts, was run for the above-mentioned texts, which turned out to be 23.7 and seemed quite suitable for the purpose of this study.

#### *2.3.2. Target words*

The text contained twelve words, including four nouns, four adjectives and four verbs, all of which were unlikely to be familiar to the subjects. This was verified in a pilot test in which fourteen students of a similar English proficiency who had not participated in the experiment were asked to underline any words in the passage whose meaning they did not know. The twelve target words were the only words that were underlined in the text and the students were requested to focus on them. These words were: *indigenous, arduous, boisterous, stunning, affability, dusk, itinerary, remuneration, resurrects, toiling, squander and saunter*.

### 2.3.3. Tasks:

The researcher introduced two tasks. Each task drew the subjects' attention to attend to each of the twelve target words in a different manner. The researcher encouraged the subjects to clear any doubts in completing the tasks, therefore, the learners were provided with necessary information in this regard.

In task 1, the learners had to select the meaning of underlined words from four options which are high frequency words. Example 1 illustrates this task:

1- In line 3 arduous means .....

a) kind      b) strict      c) hard      d) observable

As it is obvious in this task, attention is drawn to the word itself, rather than to the context surrounding it. Hence, this task is called a *form-oriented task*

In task 2, a synonym or paraphrase of the practiced word was provided and the learners had to select its corresponding word form from four options, which consisted of the correct target word and three distracters selected from the twelve target words. This task is called a *form-oriented production task*.

Example 2 illustrate this task:

2- Which word means to waste?

a) itinerary      b) arduous      c) saunter      d) squander

### 2.4. Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Do learners acquire different numbers of words using monolingual or bilingual dictionaries:
  - a) as reflected in the result of an immediate test, and
  - b) as reflected in the result of a delayed test?
2. Is there differential gain for mono and bilinguals after intervention in immediate and delayed post-tests?

### 2.5. Procedure

In the process of carrying out the study, the researchers took the following procedures to achieve the objectives of the current study. All the procedures including the development of the background questionnaire, pre-test, reading for general meaning, task performance, immediate post-test, delayed post-test and their administration are explained in detail below:

At the first step of the research, a background questionnaire was developed in order to elicit some personal information about subjects such as: their bi / monolinguality status, gender and age.

On the basis of their answers to item 6 (The language or languages that you use in and out of home) in the questionnaire, the subjects were first divided into two groups, viz., a) monolingual: if a subject was able to use just Persian in communication whether at home or outside, he/she was classified as a monolingual; and, b) bilingual: if a subject was able to use either Turkish (as first language) or Persian (as second language) in communication he /she was classified as a bilingual. Then a pre-test was administered in which twelve words were listed in alphabetical order and participants were asked to give the meanings of any words they knew in English or Persian. At the third step, a text in which the target words have been inserted in bold font was given to the subjects to read so as to understand the general meaning of the text. After a couple of minutes the subjects being randomly assigned to the use of either bilingual or monolingual dictionaries were asked to complete the respective tasks. It may be worth mentioning that the subjects were informed that in case of any difficulties with the meanings of the target words, they were requested to consult provided dictionaries in order to retain the meanings in their minds. The subjects were prohibited to write the meaning of the target words some where as in their notebook or on a piece of paper while they are completing the tasks, since the aim of the present study was to test retention of incidental words while

using mono or bilingual dictionaries. As it was mentioned earlier in the present study, subjects were randomly assigned to use either monolingual or bilingual dictionaries.

Once the tasks were completed, the subjects were immediately to give the meaning of each word either in English or Persian in so-called immediate post-test. Hence incidental acquisition of vocabulary is operationalized in the study as the ability to recall the word's meaning in L1 or L2. The above test was repeated 10 days later without any warning in order to check the retention of the words in so-called delayed post-test.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. The first hypothesis

*\*Learners acquire different numbers of words using monolingual or bilingual dictionaries:*

- a) *as reflected in the result of an immediate test, and*
- b) *as reflected in the result of a delayed test?*

Before subjecting the data to repeated measure ANOVA, to establish matching and randomization group, independent samples 't' test was employed to see whether two groups differed from each other. T-test revealed a non-significant value ('t' =.158;  $P < .876$ ), confirming matching of groups in the pre-test situation.

A significant increase in the mean scores was observed from pre to immediate post-test situations ( $F=206.620$ ) and a decrease from immediate post to delayed post-test conditions was observed irrespective of the groups. That is, in pre-test the mean score was 0.56, which was increased to 10.26 in the immediate post-test and later decreased to 6.74. However, when group-wise changes were verified, again differential changes were observed for 'English to Persian' and 'English to English' groups, which was statistically significant ( $F=6.129$ ;  $P < .004$ ). From the mean values it is evident that in 'English to Persian' group, in the pre test the mean score was 0.58, which was increased to 10.83 in the immediate post-test and later decreased to 5.83. In the case of 'English to English' group, in the pre test the mean score was 0.53, which was increased to 9.80 in the immediate post-test and later decreased to 7.47. From the table 1 and figure 1 it is clear that retention was better in 'English to English' group than 'English to Persian' one.

**Table 1**

**Mean scores of mono and bilingual subjects in different groups for pre, immediate post and delayed post-tests**

GROUPS	LINGUALITY	Conditions					
		Mean	Pre S.D	Mean	Immediate Post S.D	Mean	Delayed post S.D
E to P	Mono	0.50	0.58	10.75	1.26	3.25	1.50
	Bi 0.63	0.74	10.88	1.36	7.13	2.90	
	Total	0.58	0.67	10.83	1.27	5.83	3.10
E to E	Mono	0.67	1.12	9.89	2.80	7.56	3.64
	Bi 0.33	0.52	9.67	2.73	7.33	2.80	
	Total	0.53	0.92	9.80	2.68	7.47	3.23

Total	Mono	0.62	0.96	10.15	2.41	6.23	3.70
	Bi	0.50	0.65	10.36	2.06	7.21	2.75
Total		0.56	0.80	10.26	2.19	6.74	3.22

**Table 2**

**Results of repeated measure ANOVA for Mean scores of mono and bilingual subjects in different groups for pre, immediate post and delayed post-tests**

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CHANGE	1181.660	2	590.830	206.620	.000 (HS)
CHANGE * GROUP	35.050	2	17.525	6.129	.004 (HS)
CHANGE * LINGUALITY	14.8002	2	7.400	2.588	.086 (NS)
CHANGE * GROUP * LINGUALITY	13.949	2	6.974	2.439	.098 (NS)
Error (CHANGE)	131.537	46	2.860		

**Note: HS-Highly significant; NS-Non-significant**

### 3.2. The second hypothesis

*\* There is differential gain for mono and bilinguals after intervention in immediate and delayed post-tests:*

The interaction effects between the change of scores with linguality (mono and bilinguals) ( $F=2.588$ ;  $P<.086$ ) and change with respect to groups and linguality ( $F=2.439$ ;  $P<.098$ ) were found to be non-significant, revealing that linguality had no influence.

### 3. Conclusion

In this article, the researcher examined incidental vocabulary acquisition from reading a text and performing two tasks, which required some focus on unfamiliar words in the text. Acquisition was defined as recall of the word's meaning. It was the purpose of this study to find out whether completion task type in respect of using different kinds of dictionaries affected incidental vocabulary acquisition or not. Specifically the researcher compared bilingual and monolingual learners with different genders. In each task, learners had to look up unfamiliar target words either in bilingual or monolingual dictionaries. The subjects were randomly assigned to use either bilingual or monolingual dictionaries. The finding of this research indicated that completion of the form-oriented comprehension and form-oriented production tasks through using bilingual or monolingual dictionaries led to some vocabulary learning. As is indicated a significant increase in the mean scores from pre to immediate and post-tests and a decrease from immediate post to delayed post-tests was observed, meaning that those subjects who were assigned to use a monolingual dictionary had better retention of incidental vocabulary. This finding is in keeping with the findings of other studies (e.g., Laufer and Hulstijn, 2001, Hill and Laufer, 2003, Diab and Hamdan, 1999) which showed that learners, who read a text and perform a task, which requires some operations on the new words, including looking up the words in a dictionary, would consequently remember of some of these words. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers and learners consider the finding of this study toward a better practice in vocabulary learning.

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